

+ Matthew 11:2-10 + Do You Know What He's Bringing? + 3rd Sunday in Advent + 13 December 2015 +

The doorbell rings. You go to answer it and see through the window a driver get into a big, brown delivery truck. He starts it up and drives away. You open your door to find a cardboard package lying on the ground. You pick it up and look closely at the address tag. You see your name. You wrack your brain trying to remember what it is you're holding. Is it that gift you ordered for your spouse or kids or grandkids or is it something for you? Is it that toy or tool or tech that you recently purchased or is it a surprise? Who's it from? Where did it come from? Should you open it or someone else?

...And so it goes with each package that's dropped off at your door this time of year. The doorbell rings or the mail truck pauses at your mailbox and you're filled with excitement and anticipation all over again.

Now it's possible that you may not get that excited when a package is dropped off at your door. You may not get as excited as a little kid at Christmas practically shaking with excitement at the thought of opening gifts. Yet even grown-ups get excited. You get excited about getting your first car or first job or first home. You get excited about your graduation or wedding or the birth of a child. You may even get excited about your birthday or Christmas. You get excited, because you've been waiting for that special day. You've been waiting for what that special day will bring.

So were you that excited last night? Did you have any trouble sleeping? Do you have trouble sitting still because you're so joyful? Unless you have big plans after church today, I doubt it. I doubt that as you got ready for worship this morning, you thought, "Hey, this is the third Sunday in Advent! It's time to rejoice! It's time to get excited! Jesus is coming soon!" As much as I would love to hear that you're excited about today, I understand if you're not. So much more seems to grab our excitement this time of year.

Yet we're over halfway through the season of Advent—only twelve days until Christmas! We did light an Advent candle of a different color this morning, because amidst our watchful waiting and patient preparation, joy and hope start to build. The King of kings is coming soon and we're preparing for his arrival. So this morning the Savior comes to you through his Word and he has some great news for you. He has some very special gifts for you, but **DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE'S BRINGING?** Let's find out!

Expectation can be a funny thing. The longer you have to wait for a special gift or a special event, the more your expectation grows. The anticipation of a man and woman grows as the day of their wedding nears. The expectation of a mother and father grows as they near the birth of a child. The expectation of a child grows as Christmas nears because there are special gifts just for her. As expectation grows, excitement grows with it, but sometimes that excitement can lead to unrealistic expectations.

The day finally arrives, but things don't turn out the way you expect. The baby leaves little sleep for mom and dad needing late night diaper changes and feedings. After the honeymoon, the reality of two sinful people living together under one roof becomes apparent with arguments and hurt feelings. Christmas comes and goes. Gifts wear out or break or gather dust. The excitement that fueled your expectation starts to slip away.

John the Baptizer had high expectations. After all, he was sent to ***"prepare the way for the Lord"*** (Matthew 3:3) through the hearts of the people. He proclaimed a message of repentance because the Messiah was coming with judgment and power. ***"After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry... His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*** (Matthew 3:11-12) John prepared the way for the Lord, even pointing the crowds to Jesus. ***"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."*** (John 1:29)

With his good news shared, John expected glory and judgment and deliverance to come, but it seemed like nothing had changed. Sin still ruled the day. John, the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets, found himself locked away in the prison of a drunkard king, whose bimbo step-daughter would soon have the prophet's head literally on a silver platter. Where was the judgment, the deliverance, the glory while he sat there? Where was the One who had come to take away the sins of the world? The certainty of John's hope and expectation started to get pretty shaky.

So John sent his followers to ask Jesus a question. ***"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"*** Jesus understood how John's confidence was starting to slip. So he sent back this message with John's followers, ***"Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the***

good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”
Rejoice in the King who brings confident hope!

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Just moments ago we heard almost those exact same words from Isaiah, “[**Your God**] will come to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy...” and later in chapter 61, “**The LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.**” For an Old Testament believer like John, that was fantastic news. The King was doing everything exactly as God had promised. Jesus was giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He was raising the dead and preaching of the indescribable wealth of God's forgiveness given freely by him to the spiritually poor. That news renewed John's hope and grounded him firmly with confidence in his Savior-King.

Jesus came to save. That good news brought confident hope to John in his last days, but does it bring confident hope to you this Advent season? Does that good news of what Christ has done fill you with anticipation for his return or do the trials and troubles and tribulations of this life, not to mention the busyness, failed expectations, and sin leave you feeling hopeless?

Yes, you know the story of Jesus' birth. You've heard it time and again over the years, but has that story lost its excitement? Does it fail to take your breath away anymore? Do the reality of your sin and its daily effects make preparing for the King's return on the Last Day seem like a useless exercise when you have more pressing things to deal with right now? Do you ever find yourself like John, losing hope and excitement in Christ expecting more from him, while the sinful world and your sinful nature seem to keep winning?

Jesus understands how your confidence in him can slip. So he sends you to his Word to restore your joy with confident hope. “**The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.**” He sends you to his Word where he promises, “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**” (Matthew 11:28) He sends you to his Word where he prays from the cross, “**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing**” (Luke 23:34) and answers that prayer with “**It is finished!**” (John 19:30) Your sins are forgiven. Your salvation is won. Heaven is yours. It's all done, finished!

Jesus sends you to his Word, where he promises, “**Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age**” (Matthew 28:20b) and “**Behold, I am coming soon!**” (Revelation 22:7) He sends you to Holy Baptism, where through water and Word he forgives your sins and makes you his own. He sends you to his Holy Supper, where he promises, “**This is my body... This is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.**” He renews your hope with confidence in him.

Are there ever times when what you expect seems unimpressive at first? You look forward to a special gift from a loved one, but when you open the gift, it looks like a piece of junk. Then the giver explains the gift and you realize how precious it really is. It's like that brick we heard about in the children's message—an old, used brick given as a Christmas present to my father, but used by his grandparents to build a business after WWI.

The same was true of John the Baptizer. He was an unimpressive, strange-looking dude. He wore camel's hair clothing and ate locusts with wild honey, yet the crowds rushed out to the wilderness to hear him preach. Why did they go? Jesus explains why God had used such an unimpressive man. “**What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'**” Jesus, the Son of God, had taken the unimpressive John and made him an unexpected prophet with the best news of all—The King is finally coming!

That same King didn't just use an unimpressive prophet, but did the unexpected to bring you joy. Jesus came in poverty and lowliness, the child of a virgin mother, whose reputation was surely questioned. He willingly gave up popularity with the crowds to proclaim the truth and gave himself up to suffering. He died the death of a common criminal on a cross and even had to use a borrowed tomb. Only a few saw him in glory after he rose. Yet with such unimpressive actions, Jesus accomplished the impossible. He saved you, just as he promised. He forgave all your sins, just as he promised, so you can know he will come again, just as he promised.

Now he comes to you through Word and Sacrament. Frankly, the Bible, Baptism, and Communion don't seem impressive at all. At first glance, they're just words and water and bread and wine. Perhaps you're tempted to think that the Lord could've done better with something more noble and special. That's at least what you'd expect, but through those unimpressive means, the Lord accomplishes unexpected miracles. Jesus connects you to all that he has done for you through faith that he creates in your heart. Through those means, he forgives your sins, strengthens your faith, and grants eternal life. Through those means, he gives you unexpected joy.

So are you excited yet? Is your anticipation growing? The King is coming soon! He renews your hope and enables you to stand confidently on what he has already done for you. He brings you joy in unexpected ways. So let's get excited! The King is coming soon! Dear friends, rejoice! Amen.